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We can't have Common Core without common care

By Rick Miller My Turn Mon Jun 3, 2013 7:40 AM

Not long ago, I sat in on an orientation for kindergarten students — that special, magical and very scary day when parents and their 4- and 5-year-olds visit a brick-and-mortar structure. It's a critical moment of reflection as parents share their precious gift with an institution that, over time, will reveal whether their son or daughter is smart, not so smart or beginning a lifelong struggle for achievement.

During the meeting, several parents asked whether their children would be "safe" in school. The Sandy Hook tragedy in Newtown, Conn., was uppermost in their minds. The principal confidently replied that yes, children are safe in his school and that all protections and protocols are in place to ensure that safety.

I couldn't help wondering if all those children are emotionally safe as well.

When we discuss Arizona education, we're all caught up in the Common Core Standards. Countless hours have been devoted to hammering out the details: What teachers need to teach and what students need to learn for success in [college and career](#).

I endorse all those standards. But there is another factor. We must also address the question of common care. Without a sense of common care, no new academic standards will create better results.

The research has been absolutely clear for a long time: Students in all grades have a greater chance of success if the adults in the school believe in them and are available not only as teachers but also as caring human beings who understand that the relationship between teacher and student extends beyond the academic.

Equally important, children need to understand that [education](#) is an exciting adventure not to fear but to embrace as strategies that will help them realize their goals throughout their lives.

These simple common care standards need to be part of any education strategy.

Almost two decades ago, Yale psychiatrist James Comer said, "No significant learning happens without a significant relationship." Today, our studies reveal that 43 percent of students in Grades 5-12 lack a sense of engagement with their [schools](#).

The message is simple and powerful. What Common Core advocates envision, which I strongly support, cannot be realized unless we accept our students for who they are: children.

And children need to know that adults believe and care about them — all of them and not just some of them.

Education has a purpose greater than just qualifying for a few more years of education and getting a job. Only when those pieces are in place can you teach to the Common Core Standards.

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